

Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action

By Kevin Guyan
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Although there has been an increase in the amount and quality of research on queer¹ communities in the field of public administration, recent scholarship highlights the need for more research in this area (see Larson 2022; Meyer and Millesen 2022). Indeed, even in research on social equity and inclusion in the field, sexual orientation is often absent from discussions and gender is often treated as a binary (Meyer and Millesen 2022). *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex, and Sexuality Data for Action*, by Kevin Guyan, is a useful new book for the field of public administration that provides a good discussion of the ways that researchers acquire data about queer people and communities. Specifically, through this book, Guyan proposes that queer data, which he defines as data relating to gender, sex, sexual orientation, and trans identity/history, should be collected to improve queer lives and minimize the negative impacts of queer people being researched. *Queer Data* is an excellent guide for public administration scholars who want to include sexual orientation and gender identity and expression into their research, either as a focus or as part of larger research questions.

The main question presented in *Queer Data* is: What are the ways in which data are used, especially for a minoritized and vulnerable population like LGBTQIA+ and queer communities? Having good data can show the ways queer people and communities experience different aspects of public and nonprofit administration. Using a combination of queer theory, practical guidance,

and case studies, Guyan thoughtfully guides readers to understand better the implications of data collection, analysis, and application on queer people and communities. Furthermore, this thought-provoking book invites us to question why we collect data and how data may unintentionally harm research participants. By bringing these discussions to the forefront, Guyan asks us to think about research as not just academic, but as something that can be used to create change.

This book is divided into three sections. Part I is called “Collecting Queer Data.” The first chapter in this section explores the history of data collection on queer communities (or, more precisely, the lack thereof). Guyan shows that disaggregating data on minority groups can reveal different findings than when presented as part of a larger dataset. Because issues may arise when collecting and analyzing data around minoritized communities, Guyan asks us to question how data will be used and how data will help minority and vulnerable (in this case, LGBTQIA+) communities. Indeed, throughout this book, scholars are challenged not just to be “rational scholars” but instead to think about the implications of data and data collection on different population groups. Will our research help or hurt queer people and communities? Are we representing queer people and communities in the most authentic way? By asking these questions, we can focus not only on the research we produce, but also on how that research is being used in ways that may help or harm the communities that en-

1. In this book, the terms Queer and LGBTQ are used to discuss the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning communities. In this review, I will be using the terms Queer and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual plus (LGBTQIA+) interchangeably to talk about these communities.

trust us with their information. In the next chapter, the book looks at the different types of methods that can be used to understand queer communities. This includes an important (and admittedly short) section on ethics in queer data collection. In the next chapter, Guyan uses the Scottish Census as a case study on government queer data collection. Importantly, he focuses on the types of questions asked in surveys and provides insight into how demographic questions around sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are created. For example, Guyan emphasizes that questions should be written in the positive “I identify as X” instead of in the negative “I *don’t* identify as X,” as question wording can have implications for whether and how survey participants answer the questions. The final chapter in this section offers an international perspective, focusing on the Yogyakarta Principles, a document that provided legal standards for protection of people based on sexual orientation and gender identity as the outcome of an international meeting of human rights groups in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in 2006. This chapter could have been a separate book providing the complex analysis of data collection in the queer community in diverse cultures and communities. In this chapter, Guyan challenges the idea that sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are fixed, and instead builds on the queer theory perspective that sexual orientation and gender identity are fluid and specific to time and place (Larson 2022).

Part II is called “Analysing Queer Data.” One chapter in this part of the book explores data analysis and warns of “straightwashing,” or portraying individuals cisgender and/or straight if they do not “fit” into cisnormative or heteronormative expectations. The chapter explores ways to think about combining data if there are not enough respondents in various categories while still preserving the self-identification of respondents. The chapter also encourages us to acknowledge the presence of homophobia and transphobia in data collection and how this might influence data representation, composition, and analysis. In the next chapter, Guyan explores the ways research design can incorporate more inclusive, intersectional, and queer perspectives. In one example, he suggests that researchers invite queer participants to share their own identities during the data collection process, rather than using existing and often restrictive measures or constructions to capture queer identities. Guyan also notes that there are increasing concerns that

data may be used to debate LGBTQIA+ identities instead of supporting queerness. In the ever-expanding attacks on queer people and communities, researchers need to understand the political contexts in which their research is being published and used.

The third and final section called “Using Queer Data,” challenges the reader to think about how data are distributed. Often in academia, scholars analyze data, publish findings with data, and put these published findings behind a journal’s paywall that is only accessible to certain people and groups. Guyan invites readers to consider the ways scholars can make data analysis available to the larger public and how scholars can use data as an advocacy tool. For example, data can be used to identify problems and explore solutions for queer communities and have implications for policy and practice. Guyan invites researchers to ask questions such as: How are data on LGBTQIA+ people and communities being protected during the research process? When data are presented on LGBTQIA+ people, how might the information be used by different audiences—in a supportive or harmful way? As researchers, we must remember that the people participating in our research are volunteers, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we protect participants and the information provided by participants.

There are three ways future editions of this book could improve and expand upon the topics in this edition. To start, it would be nice if there was more “hand-holding” in the book around how to include questions on queer communities in research, especially questions that move beyond gender binaries. While this book provides an important conversation about why and how to gather and understand data about queer people and communities, relatively limited space was used to explore how to ask these questions. Secondly, as the author is from the United Kingdom, the book focuses primarily on queer data in European contexts. Though Guyan does incorporate experiences from other countries in the book, a deeper exploration into the gathering of queer data in additional continents can help illuminate some of the unique issues, homophobia, transphobia, and local understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression around the world. Lastly, it would be helpful to see more engagement around the ethics of queer data collection. This is discussed briefly in the book, but is an important topic that could be its own chapter.

Queer Data is a valuable resource that can be useful for both academics and practitioners in the field of public administration. Anyone who is doing any sort of research or surveys will find the information in this book useful for guidance on how to include LGBTQIA+ people and communities in their research and consider the important questions that need to be asked along the way. Nonprofit and public professionals who do any sort of survey or qualitative research will find the book's contents especially useful as this book explores the ways that data can be used for or against queer communities and what questions to ask to better support queer people and communities.

Overall, *Queer Data* is a fantastic book that explores how researchers can better research LGBTQIA+ communities in a responsible manner, and many of the ideas from this book can be applied to other minoritized communities. The book helps us ask the important

questions surrounding why we are collecting data and to whose benefit. As researchers, when we ask research participants for personal information and their time, we should also be asking how we are giving back and treating research participants and data with respect.

References

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